Stuck in the Waiting Room

Meetings for Modern Times

Meeting the Future

Recent changes in the business world have challenged our assumptions about where employees work, how they work, how they interact with one another, and even the definition of "what a meeting is." And experts say there is no going back to the old "business as usual."

At the core of this change is the very definition of "the office." Many workers expect to continue to work remotely, at least part time. Business leaders should plan for a combination of remote and on-site workers, in many cases with the dominant work location being remote.

As a result, one of the foundational underpinnings of the corporate world—the office meeting—is also forever changed.

The impact on business operations cannot be understated, experts agree. "This moment is as big in history as the Industrial Revolution," says Robin Raskin, founder of The Virtual Events Group. She expects the pandemic's business impact to affect everything, including workers' environments, their compensation, and overall job satisfaction.

"Old office meetings are going the way of the two martini lunch," Raskin says. Managers and employees soon will acclimate to an environment where every head takes up roughly the same amount of space in the virtual meeting application on the computer screen. Effectively, one cannot tell a visual difference between a senior executive, a staffer, and an intern.

> " One of the main reasons companies are rethinking how and where to work is because so many people want to keep the flexibility they gained during the pandemic. Although 22% of employees yearn to return to office life, 44% say they want to work remotely three days a week or more." [1]

Facing Changes

Our physical interaction changes when we are on-screen. Viewing video meetings can be exhausting for some attendees, says Joe Navarro, co-author of *What Every Body Is Saying* and *Dictionary of Body Language*. The former FBI counterintelligence and counterterrorism agent offers training in the art of reading body language and assessing an individual's intent.

> **" Our brains are used to assessing one environment.**
>
> JOE NAVARRO, FORMER FBI COUNTERINTELLIGENCE

But those interpersonal reactions change in a video meeting. Attendees must deal with a lot of movement. The screen is full of talking heads. Backgrounds are distracting. Lighting is inconsistent and sound quality is often poor.

Body language on video calls focuses on the face, not the hands, Navarro notes. When a vast amount of incoming sensory input occurs simultaneously, the human brain overloads, causing fatigue. In traditional meetings, attendees generally focus on the speaker and not every participant at the same time, he says.

Body language, which one reads easily enough in a traditional meeting room, changes significantly when attendees are reduced to boxed heads. To help, we need to change things up.
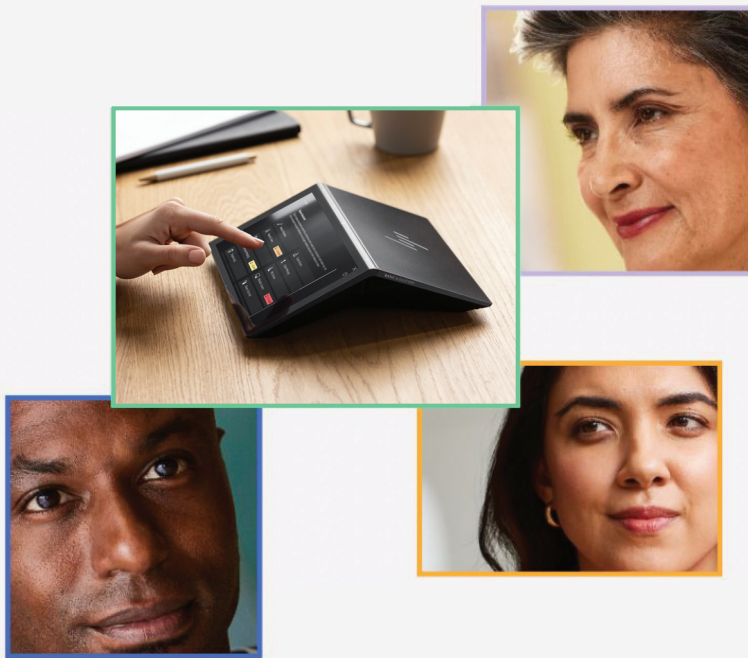
Equal Time

While the boxed heads might not easily allow one individual to dominate the "room" as one can at a live meeting, the video environment has its benefits. Because everyone appears the same on-screen, there's a visual equivalence. "It's a little bit more egalitarian in that way," says Gavin Finn, CEO of Kaon Interactive, a developer of interactive 3D applications, because remote workers are all equal. There is no proverbial head-of-the-table speaker. That changes a bit in a hybrid environment, where some employees are in the office and others are remote.

4 Tips to Be Seen Virtually

One can transform their impact in virtual meetings and presentations by making a few simple changes.

1. Be Expressive

Use gestures to show scale. If participants are talking about two options, they should use their hands to show the differences. (Consider the hand gestures a person makes when saying, "The fish was so big!") If they want their viewers to respond in a certain way, such as horror or joy, that expression should reflect on their own face.

## 2. Hold Shorter, Smaller Meetings

The ideal meeting has fewer than six people and takes less than half an hour. Many attendees never speak in a long, large meeting—and that makes it harder to encourage participation from unheard team members such as introverts.

3. Encourage Opinion Sharing

Help participants engage by asking direct questions, preferably at the beginning of the meeting. A poll or direct question helps even shy participants offer an answer or opinion.

4. Take a Stand

Try standing during an entire video meeting. Standing makes speakers more likely to use body language viewers expect from stage presenters, such as hand gestures that supplement verbal messages. But body language dictates the tone and the speaker's presence—and standing can give that sense of presence and stature. When standing, keep feet apart rather than together. The former is considered a position of strength.
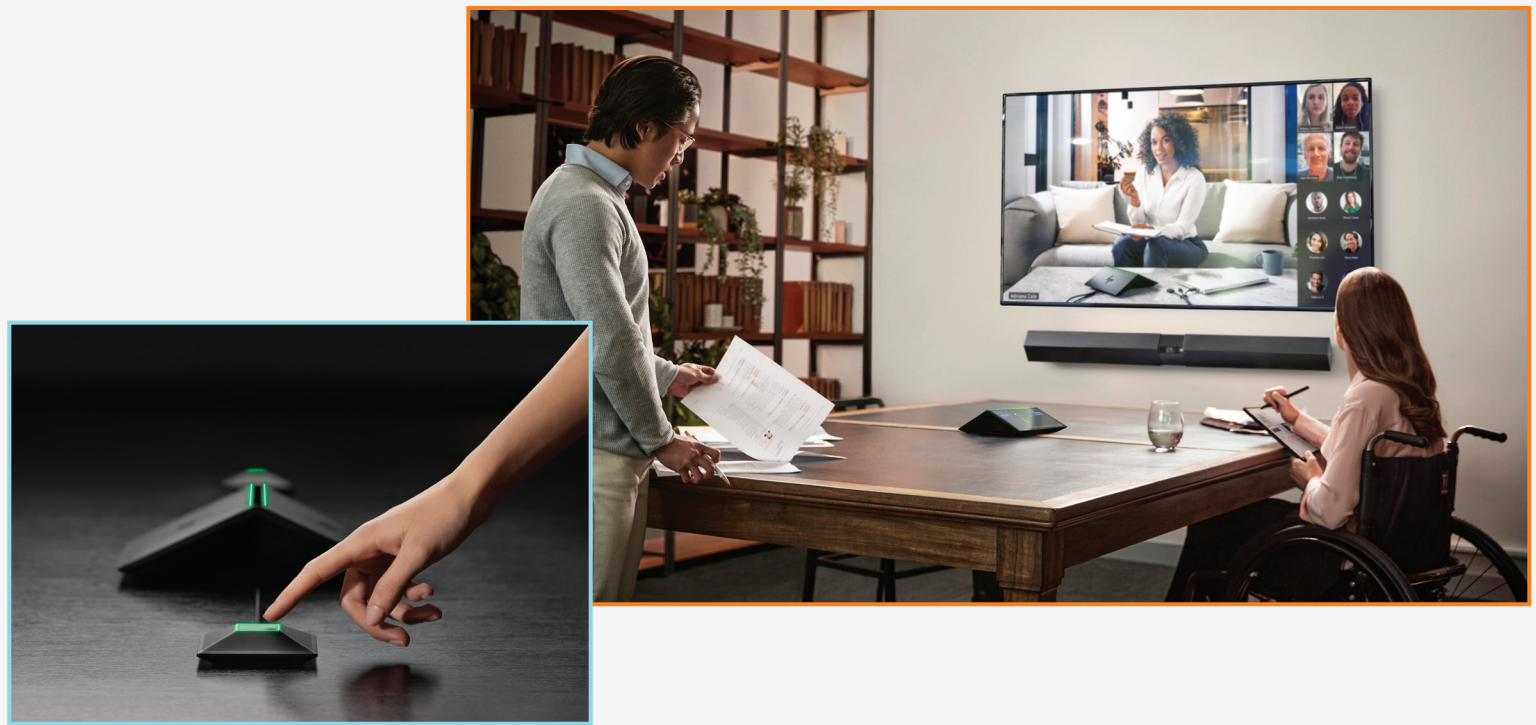
Equip to Collaborate

Collaborative video meetings have increased exponentially, and companies are still trying to adjust. That's even more important as companies build a hybrid environment for in-office and remote workers to collaborate.

You may not need an elaborate setup. Some collaboration products offer a vast array of capabilities, even though most meeting hosts use only a handful of the available functions.

Raskin likens collaboration tools to popular word-processing software, where the 80/20 rule applies:

80% of users take advantage of only 20% of the features. With proper training, business users can accomplish far more than they realize.

Beyond the conference room equipment, Raskin suggests that companies provide remote workers with better-quality video and sound hardware—especially those who attend a lot of video meetings. These meetings can be more draining on staffers than in-office meetings, and higher-quality hardware can make participating in meetings less stressful, she says.

Also, consider how to develop metrics to determine meeting success. Having a meeting is not enough, Raskin says. Instead, know what you hope to accomplish and measure whether the meetings have value and advance company goals. A largely remote workforce means more virtual meetings, so it makes sense to ensure they have measurable value and do not waste employees' time.

Looking Ahead

Everyone is working together to adjust to the new ways we hold business meetings and the new rules for engagement. The last thing anyone needs is audio-video hardware that people cuss at, or physical environments that make it more difficult to collaborate.

66% of leaders

say their companies are considering redesigning their office space for remote work.[2] Are you among them?

HP Presence is ready to help. See our white paper for guidance in rethinking the conference room for the new hybrid workforce.

Learn More ⟶

[1] PwC, "Future of work: what boards should be thinking about," https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/governance-insights-center/library/covid-19-returning-workplace-boards.html

[2] Microsoft Work Trend Index, "The Next Great Disruption Is Hybrid Work—Are We Ready?" 2021, https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work

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